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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2018  
TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: ALEVIS DETERMINED TO END MANADATORY  
RELIGION COURSES

REF: A. ANKARA 448  
[1](#)B. ANKARA 513

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)  
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Alevi groups are committed to ensuring the GOT implements the Council of State's (Danistay's) March 3 ruling allowing students to be excused from Turkey's mandatory religious courses (ref A). These groups believe the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) criticisms of the decision evince a "selective" support of democratic principles; they expect AKP to bury the issue for now because of the enormous attention being devoted to the AKP closure case (ref B). Alevis will gather on March 22 in Ankara to develop strategies to keep the religious education issue in the news and on the GOT's agenda. AKP can show genuine committment to protecting freedoms for all Turks by moving forward with modern educational reforms that do not impose a Sunni-centric views on Alevis and non-Muslims. End summary and comment.

#### Alevi Groups Say They Won't Be Deterred

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[1](#)2. (C) Hussein Gazi Association President Ali Yildirim told us Turkey's Alevi community is mobilizing to ensure the GOT implements the Danistay's March 3 ruling to allow students to opt out of required religious education courses. Yildirim believes Minister of Education Huseyin Celik showed AKP's "selective use" of the Constitution when he declared the document requires all Muslim citizens to take the course. Yildirim noted also that Turkey had committed to accepting ECHR precedent as superseding Turkish law, including the Constitution. Yildirim dismissed Celik's remark that the MOE had overhauled the content and issued new textbooks while the cases proceeded, rendering the Danistay and ECHR decisions moot. Both the ECHR and Danistay had rejected the argument because the "new" content amounted to a handful of pages describing Alevism and other religions from a Sunni standpoint. (Comment: Our cursory analysis of the new books bears out Yildirim's claim.)

[1](#)3. (C) Alevis expect AKP to hide behind their closure case as an excuse not to implement the Danistay and ECHR rulings, and are therefore determined to keep the issue in the news and on the GOT's agenda, Yildirim said. Alevi groups will gather on March 22 at a Pir Sultan Abdul-organized conference to discuss possible strategies, including filing criminal

complaints against the Minister of Education and Diyanet President for their recent "discriminatory" remarks, and organizing Alevi parents to file thousands of cases in Turkish courts and the ECHR.

#### Alevis Ambivalent About AKP Closure Case

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¶4. (C) Middle East Technology University (METU) professor Aykan Erdemir is monitoring closely the Alevi community's reaction to the closure case against AKP. He told us Alevis thus far are ambivalent toward the closure -- on the one hand deriving enormous pleasure from this development, on the other recalling the many closures against their own radical leftist parties. He expects the heterogeneous Alevi groups to have a vocal debate on the issue at the upcoming conference.

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